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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a unit of study on Mexico for students in grades 5-10 but can be adapted to other grade levels. Background information on significant events in Mexican history is presented. Activities are suggested along with recommendations for continuing study of Mexican history and an examination of Mexico today. Suggestions for discussion and activities focus on the concept of cultural universals as basic components that all cultures have. (EH)

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Mexico: Land of Contrasts.

by Sue C. Little

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Fulbright-Hays Seminar-Mexico

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The following curriculum project integrates the Fulbright Mexico Summer Seminar, 1997 into a lesson plan which can be used for different purposes and with different grade levels

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MEXICO: LAND OF CONTRASTS

RATIONALE

This curriculum project, **"Mexico: Land of Contrasts"**, is intended for students in grades 5 - 10. However, the strategies utilized are appropriate for any level, K- adult learners. In addition to being used as a vehicle for teaching about the land and peoples of Mexico, these strategies are good as INTO (introductory) lessons for the study of any culture (Cultural Universals) and are appropriate for second language learners/SDAIE lessons. These strategies could be used for developing critical thinking skills, where the study of the culture is the secondary purpose. The format utilizes cooperative learning.

Depending on the teacher's purpose in using this project (above), more information may be desired concerning t the past and present of Mexico than is included with this project. A bibliography is included with internet as well as other types of sources.

MEXICO - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Geographically and culturally, Mexico is a land of extraordinary contrasts. The past and present contribute to the cultural richness and challenges facing Mexico. The 20th century thrives alongside evidence of thriving Pre-Hispanic empires. Thousands of citizens live in rural parts of the country much as their ancestors did , while cosmopolitan Mexico City is home to approximately 22 million inhabitants. Mexico is an excellent example of the blending of the old and the new, resulting in a unique and rich culture.

Students' study of Mexico should include:

A. The land and peoples of northern Mexico.

Pre-Columbian ruins in the northern part of the country attest to the similarity of lifestyle and heritage with the southwestern parts of the United States. Many archaeological sights have been uncovered and much work is being done. A mere fraction of the remains of previous empires has been unearthed as of today.

The topography and climate is similar to that in southwestern U.S. Remember that Indians of the U.S. southwest share a common heritage with the Indians who lived and are living in northern Mexico. An example of the old adobe structures, partially excavated and restored, can be found in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua (about 4 hours sw of Juarez). The Paquimé structures are similar to the pueblos of the US sw. A uniquely native influence is evidence of a ball court here. There are beautiful petroglyphs in nearby caves. Paquimé's history is linked to the Apaches, who probably invaded in 1300's The Indians of the area had contact with those in

U.S. southwest as evidenced by some of the art work and other artifacts that have been discovered. Cueva Grande, south of Nuevo Casas Grandes, has a cave inside which are some ancient dwellings resembling those of Pueblo Indians of the southwest USA.

DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Pictures showing the excavated adobes and the land in northern Mexico would be difficult to distinguish from pictures of the land and pueblos of SW United States. This could be a focal point for a discussion of commonalities of cultural development. This could also lead to a discussion of the effects of the creation of national boundaries/borders. Students often do not understand that just because countries have agreed on the actual border lines, the people on each side, their life styles, their relationships, etc. may be more alike than different.

Copper Canyon (Barranca del Cobre) is a beautiful natural wonder which consists of about 20 canyons. Together they are four times larger than Arizona's Grand Canyon. The famous Copper Canyon Railway makes several stops as it winds along on breathtaking vistas and switch backs.

The area between Creel and Los Mochis is home of the **Tarahumara Indians**, who live in the canyons of the Sierra Tarahumara, of which Copper Canyon is one. Although the Tarahumara are a large tribe (estimated more than 50,000), they have been one of the most isolated. To escape the invasion by the Spanish, the Tarahumara went further and further in to the canyons. Consequently, it has only been relatively recently that the 20th century has reached them. Consequently they have maintained many of their ancient cultural traditions. One such tradition is the foot races for which they are famous, in which they run nonstop , 160 km or more, through rough, steep terrain, kicking a small wooden ball ahead of them. In their language they call themselves "Raramuri", meaning those who run fast. Many still live in caves and log cabins and subsist on very basic agriculture and herding of goats. Many speak only their native language. Many now supplement their meager incomes by selling their crafts, such as baskets and toys traditionally made for their children. Seen following their flocks of goats, the women and girls stand out in their brightly colored layered skirts.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Pictures of these Indians living as they did centuries ago contrasted with examples of the 20th century would provoke interesting discussions related to how people adapt to their environment, how people survive the encroachment of others in to their way of life, how contact with the 20th century is changing the way of life of these people, and the meaning and effects of culture clash.

B. The ancient cultures of the Olmec, Aztec, and Maya. Their architecture, numerological and astronomical expertise, religious beliefs, and demise should be introduced. Remains of their cultures are found in many parts of Mexico and it is acknowledged that many more remains exist that have just not been excavated.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

In addition to information about the developments of the major empires of Mexico and their accomplishments, discussions could include the geography and its influence on the development of the civilizations, the difficulty of excavating their remains, how scientists form conclusions about people based on archaeological finds.

Pictures of sites such as Teotihuacan near Mexico City provide for comparison and contrast with the architecture of the Egyptian pyramids and their functions versus the temples of the Mexican empires.

C. Colonial Mexico.

Architecture bearing the influence of the Spanish is especially rich in the churches, cathedrals and public buildings.

There are examples of Gothic and Renaissance: *plateresque*, unique to Mexico, and Herreresque. Outstanding examples: Merida's cathedral and Casa de Montejo in Yucatan. Gothic and Renaissance were combined in many of the monasteries built by Spanish monks. Motable monasteries are in Actapan, Acolman, and Huejotzingo, in central Mexico, and in Yanhuitlan, Coixtlahuaca, and Teposcolula in Oaxaca.

Spanish Arabic architecture, evolved from the Arabic influence in Spain, is known as *Mudéjar*. The 49 domes of the Capilla Real in Cholula almost resemble a mosque.

Baroque style reached Mexico in the early 17th century. Painting and sculpture were integrated with architecture for an elaborate effect, in and around ornate, enormous altar pieces. Examples: churches in Santiago Tlatelolco in Mexico City, San Felipe Neri in Oaxaca, San Francisco in San Luis Potoseí, San Cristóbal in Puebla, the Zacatecas cathedral facade.

Churrigueresque is the name of the uniquely Mexican style of baroque which reached its final from between 1730 and 1780. It is characterized by surface ornamentation of which the hallmark is a vertical pillar projecting only partly from the wall (estípite) in the form of a very narrow upside-down pyramid. Examples: Sagrario Metropolitano in Mexico City; San Martín in Tepotzotlán; San Francisco, La Compañía and La Valenciana in Guanajuato.

Mexican Indian artistry added a profusion of detailed sculpture in stone and colored stucco to many baroque buildings. They were able to incorporate some ancient beliefs along with their new Christianity in their artwork (often unbeknownst to the priests). Examples: Capilla del Rosario in Santo Domingo church, Puebla and the village church of Tonantzintla near Puebla. This church also shows the Arabic influence of decorating the outside of buildings with colored tiles(*azulejos*).

D. Modern Mexico.

There are many examples of 20th century architecture, art, industry. Towards the end of the 19th century many buildings copied contemporary French or Italian contemporary styles in architecture. Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City is a beautiful example of this influence.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

It is interesting to note in what unique ways one culture adopts or reacts to the influences of other cultures. There are examples in architecture as well as language, all of the arts, religion, etc. Students could look at the examples of how the people of Mexico incorporated their ancient religious beliefs with Christianity and how that blending was evidenced in their unique architecture and religious customs, such as Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos celebrations.

E. Geography

Because of its size and location, Mexico contains temperate and tropical regions, latitudes which contain most of the earth's deserts; mountains, volcanoes, forests.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Photos and discussion could revolve around the influence of geography on the development of cultures, as well as comparison/contrast with geography/climate in the U.S.

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PROCEDURES

I. Preplanning

1st , clarify your goals and purposes. See above introduction - Is your focus on Curriculum content - i.e. Mexico? Is your focus on promoting language development or critical thinking skills, etc.?

Materials Needed:

A variety of pictures of Mexico. Be sure to include rural scenes, urban settings, people in traditional dress and in contemporary dress; architecture representing colonial, pre-Hispanic, and contemporary; scenes depicting poverty and wealth.

Pictures can be obtained from a variety of sources. Contact travel agencies, Department of Tourism (bibliography) of Mexico, specific cities. Travel books.

Slides can be made by taking photos of pictures in books and magazines. There are slide stands which help to steady the camera, but it is not necessary to have one in order to create your own slides. Just frame your picture (using dark paper or fabric), be sure you have adequate light, hold your camera steady, and shoot.

Depending on the source of your pictures, you can cut out and mount pictures. These would then be available for use with the2nd lesson.

For this lesson, you can show 1 slide at a time to the whole class, while students discuss in their groups or you can provide 1 picture per group. The more pictures you have the better.

Suggested number of students per group for this project is partners or triads. If not enough pictures are available, have partners/groups take turns studying their picture and then give the picture to the next group. It's important that each student contribute to the brainstorming and discussion so have students discuss in groups no larger than 3.

II. Setting up the lesson - Establishing the goals for students

If using slides: Show the slide to the entire class. Direct them to study the picture. An advantage of this approach is that everyone can see the picture as the whole group discussion is being conducted.

They should discuss their observations with their partner. Record their observations. Share their observations and participate in further teacher-led discussion

If using a variety of pictures: Another way to do this activity is to arrange the pictures around the classroom and let students go from picture to picture. An advantage of this approach is that students are able to move around and are able to examine the picture up close.

Number the pictures and have students number their notes accordingly. To avoid piling up around certain pictures, have them move from picture to picture according to a cue from the teacher. Or, have students work at their desks, getting from the teacher a new picture when ready.

TEACHER-LED DISCUSSION

Students should hypothesize what they know or think they know about the place and, if any, people in the picture. Have them relate this discussion to the Cultural Universals if they are familiar with them. Post a copy of the Cultural Universals or provide each group with the list. (Cultural Universals list in appendix)

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Sample questions:

General: We see...

We think or believe... (Students draw conclusions about what they see.)

We wonder. . .

Specific questions related to the Cultural Universals:

What do you know or think you know about the time period relative to this picture? The location? The land, climate, terrain? What do you know or think you know about the people? What are some of their customs or beliefs based on what you see in the picture. What do you know or think you know about their technology?

III. Debriefing the activity, students observations and conclusions.

If using slides, show the slide as you discuss the pictures. If you do not have slides, pass the pictures around as you discuss each so that everyone has a chance to see it and review it.

Ask students to share their findings and observations. Do not comment on the correctness of their assumptions. Just clarify or restate if needed.

TEACHER LED DISCUSSION

At the end of the sharing, ask questions, such as:

1. Are there similarities between the pictures (comparing 2 or 3 pictures)?
2. Have similar assumptions been made for different pictures regarding geography, customs, etc?
3. What are the differences between the pictures, geography, people, etc.? (comparing 2 or 3 pictures)
4. Are there similarities among all of the pictures? Is there anything that they all have in common? What same or similar conclusions did various groups from their pictures? Are there any new hypothesis you wish to make?
5. What country to do think these pictures are from? What period in time?

IV. Teaching using the pictures.

Now go back and use the pictures to elaborate on Mexico and the Cultural Universals represented.

TEACHER LED DISCUSSION

Discuss how hypothesis were arrived at and correct misinterpretations. If the goal is to use these pictures as a vehicle for teaching about the culture, go through the pictures in a predetermined sequence and discuss information pertinent to the unit of study.

If the goal was primarily developing critical thinking skills, discuss the process involved in observing and drawing conclusions. An interesting discussion could take place if students drew different conclusions for the same picture. Focus of the discussion can be how prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influenced the conclusions.

If the goal is also language development, focus on new vocabulary that you want them to acquire. The vocabulary may be relative to Mexico and/or the Cultural Universals.

CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

This is a good framework to use when studying any culture in any time or place. If it is used as a framework for the study of cultures, it helps students make connections and relate information across cultures. The concepts pertain to all cultures.
The premise is that all cultures have basic components.

TIME
PLACE
GOVERNMENT
ECONOMICS
FAMILY & KIN
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
SOCIAL CUSTOMS
FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER
AESTHETICS: ART, MUSIC, LITERATURE (ORAL OR WRITTEN), DRAMA
RECREATION

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Ruiz, Olivia, and others. *Introduction to Mexico: A Workbook*. Washington, D.C.: Youth for Understanding International Exchange, 1992.

Villegas, Daniel Cosío, and others. A Compact History of Mexico. Mexico: El Colégio de Mexico, 1985.

Above compiled by Mary Patrice Koscielny in *MEXICO: YESTERDAY AND TODAY*; a curriculum for students in grades 5 - 10, in which she capsulizes the history of Mexico and includes short lessons about different aspects of the history and culture. Available on internet ERIC

Mexico, A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit. Lonely Planet Publications. (Pictures, historical & cultural summaries)

Insiders Guides: Mexico. Houghton Mifflin Company/APA Publications. (Good Pictures; historical & cultural summaries)

Internet

More sites are being added all the time. With a cable, you can connect your computer to a larger TV monitor for whole class viewing. There are also connections for overhead projectors to link to computer. With a color printer, beautiful pictures can be downloaded and printed.

General: *Mexico History Directory* : All kinds of links www.mexonline.com/history.htm
http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/8832/mayaframe.html

Maya: brief history and beautiful pictures of various ruins.
Tarahumara Indians:
http://www.mexonline.com/raramuri/html
http://www.mexonline.com/tfr.htm This site is about an effort by a charitable organization, Wilderness Expeditions, to help Tarahumara over a 10 year period and about the critical living conditions due to drought and poverty.

Aztec - Tlahuica Cultures of central Mexico http://www.albany.edu/~mesmith/tlahuica.html

Aztec - Includes a link to Aztec origin myths.
www.indians.org/welker/mexmano01.html